Yamato people

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ku, lit. 'Yamato ethnicity') or the ***Wajin*** (和人 / 倭人, nic group that comprises over 98% of the population of Japan. Genetic and anthropometric studies have shown that the Yamato are an admixture of the migratory Kofun and Yayoi, who arrived from mainland East and Southeast Asia via the Korean Peninsula, as well as the indigenous Jōmon that were already living on the Japanese archipelago for thousands of years prior.[2]

It can also refer to the first people that settled in Yamato Province (modern-day Nara Prefecture). Generations of Japanese archeologists, historians, and linguists have debated whether the word is related to the earlier Yamatai (邪馬臺). Around the 6th century, the Yamato clan set up Japan's first and only dynasty. The clan became the ruling faction in the area, and incorporated the natives of Japan and migrants from the mainland.[3] The clan leaders also elevated their own belief system that featured ancestor worship into a national religion known as Shinto.[3]

The term came to be used around the late 19th century to distinguish the settlers of mainland Japan from minority ethnic groups inhabiting the peripheral areas of the then Japanese Empire, including the Ainu, Ryukyuans, Nivkh, as well as Chinese, Koreans, and Austronesians (Taiwanese indigenous peoples and Micronesians) who were incorporated into the Empire of Japan in the early 20th century. The term was eventually used as race propaganda. After Japan's surrender in World War II, the term became antiquated for suggesting pseudoscientific racist notions that have been discarded in many circles.[4] Ever since the fall of the Empire, Japanese statistics only count their population in terms of nationality, rather than ethnicity.

Etymology

The *Wajin* (also known as *Wa* or *Wō*) or *Yamato* were the names early China used to refer to an ethnic group living in Japan around the time of the Three Kingdoms period. Ancient and medieval East Asian scribes regularly wrote *Wa* or *Yamato* with one and the same Chinese character 倭 until the 8th century, when the Japanese found fault with it, replacing it with 和 "harmony, peace, balance". Retroactively, this character was adopted in Japan to refer to the country itself, often combined with the character 大, literally meaning "Great", similar to Great Qing or Great Britain, so as to write the preexisting name *Yamato* (大和, e.g., such as 大清帝國 "Great Qing Empire" or 大英帝國 "Great British Empire"). The pronunciation *Yamato* cannot be formed from the sounds of its constituent Chinese characters; it is speculated to originally refer to a place in Japan meaning "Mountain Gate" (山戸).[5]

The historical province of Yamato within Japan (now Nara Prefecture in central Honshu) borders Yamashiro Province (now the southern part of Kyoto Prefecture); however, the names of both provinces appear to contain the Japonic etymon *yama*, usually meaning "mountain(s)" (but sometimes having a meaning closer to "forest", especially in some Ryukyuan languages). Some other pairs of historical provinces of Japan exhibit similar sharing of one etymological element, such as Kazusa (<**Kami-tu-Fusa*, "Upper Fusa") and Shimōsa (<**Simo-tu-Fusa*, "Lower Fusa") or Kōzuke (<**Kami-tu-Ke*, "Upper Ke") and Shimotsuke (<**Simo-tu-Ke*, "Lower Ke"). In these latter cases, the pairs of provinces with similar names are thought to have been created through the subdivision of an earlier single province in prehistoric or protohistoric times.

Yamato

大和民族

Yamato-no-Takeru, prince of the imperial dynasty

Regions with significant populations

Japan

Languages

Japanese

Religion

Traditionally

⛩ Shinto and ☸ Japanese Buddhism

Largely

Irreligion

Minority

✝ Christianity, Japanese new religions

Related ethnic groups

Ryukyuan people · Yayoi people · Ainu people · Jōmon people

Although the etymological origins of Wa remain uncertain, Chinese historical texts recorded an ancient people residing in the Japanese archipelago, named something like **'Wâ* or **'Wər* 倭. Carr[6]:9–10 surveys prevalent proposals for the etymology of *Wa* ranging from feasible (transcribing Japanese first-person pronouns *waga* 我が "my; our" and *ware* 我 "I; we; oneself") to shameful (writing Japanese *Wa* as 倭 implying "dwarf"), and summarizes interpretations for **'Wâ* "Japanese" into variations on two etymologies: "behaviorally 'submissive' or physically 'short' ". The first "submissive; obedient" explanation began with the (121 CE) *Shuowen Jiezi* dictionary. It defines 倭 as *shùnmào* 順皃 "obedient/submissive/docile appearance", graphically explains the "person; human' radical with a *shùnmàowěi* 委 "bent" phonetic, and quotes the above *Shi Jing* poem. "Conceivably, when Chinese first met Japanese," Carr[6]:9 suggests, "they

transcribed *Wa* as **'Wâ* 'bent back' signifying 'compliant' bowing/obeisance. Bowing is noted in early historical references to Japan." Examples include "Respect is shown by squatting",[7] and "they either squat or kneel, with both hands on the ground. This is the way they show respect."[8]

Koji Nakayama interprets *wēi* 逶 "winding" as "very far away" and euphemistically translates *Wō* 倭 as "separated from the continent". The second etymology of *wō* 倭 meaning "dwarf (variety of an animal or plant species), midget, little people" has possible cognates in *ǎi* 矮 "low, short (of stature)", *wō* 踒 "strain; sprain; bent legs", and *wò* 臥 "lie down; crouch; sit (animals and birds)". Early Chinese dynastic histories refer to a *Zhūrúguó* 侏儒國 "pygmy/dwarf country" located south of Japan, associated with possibly Okinawa Island or the Ryukyu Islands. Carr cites the historical precedence of construing Wa as "submissive people" and the "Country of Dwarfs" legend as evidence that the "little people" etymology was a secondary development.

History of usage

After Meiji restoration

Propaganda

Scientific racism was a Western idea that was imported from the late nineteenth century onward. Despite the notion being hotly contested by Japanese intellectuals and scholars, the false notion of racial homogeneity was used as propaganda due to the political circumstances of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan, which coincided with Japanese imperialism and World War II.[4] Pseudoscientific racial theories, which included the false belief of the superiority of the Yamato character, were used to justify military expansionism, discriminatory practices, and ethnocentrism.[4] The concept of "pure blood" as a criterion for the uniqueness of the Yamato *minzoku* began circulating around 1880 in Japan, around the time some Japanese scientists began investigations into eugenics.[9]

Initially, to justify Imperial Japan's conquest of Continental Asia, Imperial Japanese propaganda espoused the ideas of Japanese supremacy by claiming that the Japanese represented a combination of all East Asian peoples and cultures, emphasizing heterogeneous traits.[10] Imperial Japanese propaganda started to place an emphasis on the ideas of racial purity and the supremacy of the Yamato race when the Second Sino-Japanese War intensified.[10] Fuelled by the ideology of racial supremacy, racial purity, and national unity between 1868 and the 1940s, the Meiji and Imperial Japanese government carefully identified and forcefully assimilated marginalized populations, which included Okinawans, the Ainu, and other underrepresented non-Yamato groups, imposing assimilation programs in language, culture and religion.[11]

According to Aya Fujiwara, a postdoctoral Fellow at McMaster University, in an attempt to have some influence over the Japanese diaspora in Canada, Imperial Japanese authorities used the term Yamato as race propaganda during World War II, saying that:

> "For Japanese-Canadians in particular, the Emperor was the most natural symbol to promote primordial national sentiment and superiority of the Yamato race — the term that the Japanese used to distinguish themselves from others. This term meant a noble race, the members of which saw themselves as "chosen people." The modernization of Japan, which began with the Meiji Restoration in 1868, produced a number of historical writings that tried to define the Japanese under the official scheme to create a strong nation. Imported to Canada by Japanese intellectuals, a "common myth of descent" that Japanese people belonged to the noble Yamato race headed by the Emperor since the ancient period was one of the core elements that defined Japanese-Canadian ethno-racial identity in the 1920s and the 1930s. The evolution and survival of an ethnic community, Anthony D. Smith argues, relies on the complicated "belief-system" that creates "a sacred communion of the people" with cultural and historical distinctiveness. During this period, Japanese intellectuals, scholars, and official representatives sought to keep Japanese Canadians within their sphere of influence, thereby reinforcing a transnational myth that would promote Japanese Canadians' sense of racial pride as God's chosen people in the world."[12]

World War II and Holocaust historian Bryan Mark Rigg noted in 2020 how Yamato master race theory was included in government propaganda and schools in the decades leading up to World War II and how *Gaijin* were regarded in Japan as subhumans.[13] Discrimination also occurred against non-Yamato races in Japan such as the Ainu and Ryūkyū peoples.[14][15]

Contemporary usage

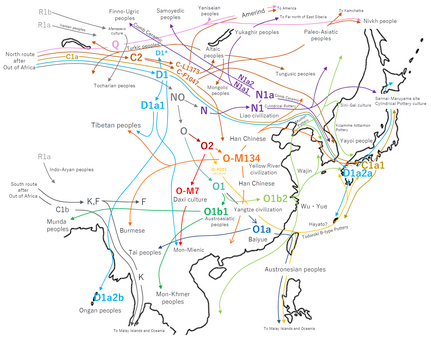
At the end of the World War II, the Japanese government continued to adhere to the notions of racial homogeneity and racial supremacy, with the Yamato race at the top of the racial hierarchy.[16] Japanese propaganda of racial purity returned to post-World War II Japan because of the support of the Allied forces. U.S. policy in Japan terminated the purge of high-ranking war criminals and

reinstalled the leaders who were responsible for the creation and manifestation of prewar race propaganda.[17]

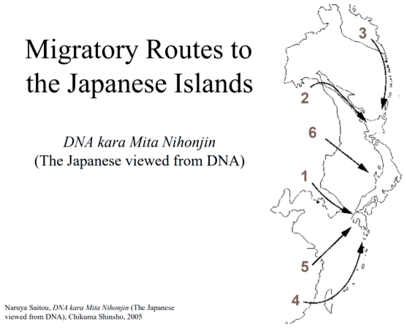
In present-day Japan, the term *Yamato minzoku* may be seen as antiquated for connoting racial notions that have been discarded in many circles since Japan's surrender in World War II.[18] "Japanese people" or even "Japanese-Japanese" are often used instead, although these terms also have complications owing to their ambiguous blending of notions of ethnicity and nationality.[19]

In present-day Japan statistics only counts their population in terms of nationality, rather than ethnicity, thus the number of ethnic Yamato and their actual population numbers are ambiguous.[20]

Origin



Proposed population migration routes into Japan, based on haplogroups.[21][22][23][24][25][26][27][28]



Migration routes into Japan during the Jōmon period

The most well-regarded theory is that present-day Yamato Japanese are descendants from both the Yayoi people and the various local Jōmon people. Japanese people belong to the East Asian lineages D-M55 and O-M175, with a minority belonging to C-M217 and N-M231.[29] The reference population for the Japanese (Yamato) used in Geno 2.0 Next Generation is 89% East Asia, 2% Finland and Northern Siberia, 2% Central Asia, and 7% Southeast Asia & Oceania, making Japanese approximately ~100% East-Eurasian.[30] The Yamato show a close genetic relationship with other modern East Asians such as the Han Chinese and Koreans.[31][32][33][34][35][36][37] Genealogical

research has indicated extremely similar genetic profiles between these three East Asian ethnic groups, making them nearly indistinguishable from each other and ancient samples. Yamatos were also found to share high genetic affinity with the ancient (~8,000 BC) "Devils_Gate_N" sample in the Amur region of Northeast Asia.[38]

The earliest written records about people in Japan are from Chinese sources. These sources spoke about the Wa people, the direct ancestors of the Yamato and other Japonic agriculturalists. The Wa of Na received a golden seal from the Emperor Guangwu of the Eastern Han dynasty. This event was recorded in the *Book of the Later Han* compiled by the Chinese historian Fan Ye in the 5th century AD. The seal itself was discovered in northern Kyūshū in the 18th century.[39] Early Chinese historians described Wa as a land of hundreds of scattered tribal communities.[40] Third-century Chinese sources reported that the Wa/early Yamato lived on raw fish, vegetables, and rice served on bamboo and wooden trays, clapped their hands in worship (something still done in Shinto shrines today), and built earthen-grave mounds. They also maintained vassal-master relations, collected taxes, had provincial granaries and markets, and observed mourning. The *Wei Zhi* (Chinese: 魏志), which is part of the Records of the three Kingdoms, first mentions Yamataikoku and Queen Himiko in the 3rd century. According to the record, Himiko assumed the throne of Wa, as a spiritual leader, after a major civil war. Her younger brother was in charge of the affairs of state, including diplomatic relations with the Chinese court of the Kingdom of Wei.[41] When asked about their origins by the Wei embassy, the people of Wa claimed to be descendants of the people of Wu, a historic figure of the Wu Kingdom around the Yangtze Delta of China, however this is disputed.[42][43]

Japonic speakers were also present on the southern and central Korean Peninsula. These Peninsular Japonic-speaking agriculturalists were later replaced/assimilated by Koreanic-speakers (from southern Manchuria) likely causing the Yayoi migration and expansion within the Japanese archipelago.[44][45] Whitman (2012) suggests that the Yayoi agriculturalists are not related to the proto-Koreans but that they were present on the Korean peninsula during the Mumun pottery period. According to him, Japonic arrived in the Korean peninsula around 1500 BC and was brought to the Japanese archipelago by the Yayoi agriculturalists at around 950 BC, during the late Jōmon period. The language family associated with both Mumun and Yayoi culture is Japonic. Koreanic arrived later from Manchuria to the Korean peninsula at around 300 BC and coexisted with the descendants of the Japonic Mumun cultivators (or assimilated them). Both had influence on each other and a later founder effect diminished the internal variety of both language families.[46]

A genetic study (2019) estimated that the Yamato share more than 90% of their genome with the Yayoi rice agriculturalists and less than 10% with the heterogeneous Jōmon period groups.[47] A later study by Gakuhari et al. 2019 estimates that the Yamato people have between 92% and 96.7% Yayoi rice-agriculturalist ancestry (with the 3.3% to 8% from the heterogeneous Jōmon period tribes)

and cluster closely with other Koreans and Han Chinese, but are slightly shifted towards eastern Siberians.[48]

Based on archaeological evidence and the genetic similarity between Yamato and Koreans, the American geographer and historian Jared Diamond said that the Yayoi people, the ancestors of the Yamato people, migrated from the Korean peninsula.[49] Watanabe et al. 2021 found that the Jōmon people were a heterogeneous population and that Japanese from different regions had different amounts of Jōmon-derived SNP alleles, ranging from 17.3% to 24% represented by southern Jōmon, and 3.8% to 14.9% represented by northern Jōmon. Southern Jōmon were genetically similar to contemporary East Asians (especially Tujia people, Tibetan people and Miao people), while northern Jōmon had a partial distinct ancestry component, possibly deriving from Paleolithic Siberians, next to an East Asian ancestry component. The Jōmon period population, although heterogeneous, were closest to contemporary East Asians and Native Americans.[50]

In 2021, research from a study published in the journal Science Advances found that the people of Japan bore genetic signatures from three ancient populations, rather than just two as previously thought.[51][52] Two of these populations were the Jōmon and the Yayoi. According to the researchers, Japanese people have approximately 13% and 16% genetic ancestry from these two groups, respectively. The remaining 71% of genetic ancestry was found to come from migrants that arrived around 300 AD during the Kofun period, and had genetic makeup mainly resembling the modern Han Chinese population. This migrant group was said to have brought cultural advances and centralised leadership to Japan. According to Shigeki Nakagome, co-leader of the study, "Chinese characters started to be used in this period, such as Chinese characters inscribed on metal implements, for example swords."[51]

In a study in 2022 conducted by the University of Xiamen, researchers discovered that despite finding evidence of the Jōmon people on the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago, there were little to no traces left of their genetic impact in their respective people's gene pools.[53] According to the study, Ancient Koreans were composed of "Northeast Asian-related ancestry and indigenous Jōmon-related ancestry" where the "Northeast Asian ancestry was suggested to be related to the Neolithic West Liao River farmers in northeast China."[53] The finding indicated that the "West Liao River-related farmers might have spread the proto-Korean language as their ancestry was found to be predominant in extant Koreans" and these "Proto-Korean groups, in turn, introduced West Liao River-like ancestry into the gene pool of present-day Japan".[53] These people are thought to have caused the displacement of the indigenous Jōmon people, causing a significant diminishment of Jōmon genomes in the regions. It was deduced that this event (and the populations remaining genetically homogeneous since then) was what caused modern Koreans and Japanese to share the majority of their genetic makeup[53] as the latter group "can be represented

as a mixture of Koreans (91%) with a limited genetic heritage from a basal East Asian lineage related to Jōmon (9%)."[54][53]

A 2024 study clarified that the Japanese people descended from indigenous Jōmon, East Asians (i.e. Han Chinese) and Northeast Asians (i.e. peoples in the Korean Peninsula and early non-Jōmon Japanese). Jōmon ancestry is dominant in South Japan, especially Okinawa (28.5%), followed by Northeast Japan (19%) and West Japan (12%). East Asian ancestry is dominant in West Japan and gradually decreases to the east. In contrast, Northeast Asian ancestry is dominant in Northeast Japan and gradually decreases to the west. These trends explain why variants of the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes, which are associated with herediatry breast cancer, are common in the east and west of Japan respectively. These genes came from Northeast Asian-related Japanese and continental Asians. [55]

Ryukyuan people

Major disagreements exists as to whether the Ryukyuans are considered the same as the Yamato, or identified as an independent but related ethnic group, or as a sub-group that constitutes Japanese ethnicity together with the Yamato. Ryukyuans have a distinct culture from the Yamato, with its own native cuisine, history, language, religion and traditions.[56][57]

From the Meiji period—during which the Ryukyuan's kingdom was annexed by Japan—and onward, Japanese scholars such as Shinobu Orikuchi and Kunio Yanagita supported the later discredited ideological viewpoint that they were a sub-group of the Yamato people. The Ryukyuans were forcibly assimilated into Japanese (Yamato) people with their ethnic identity, tradition, culture and language suppressed by the Meiji government.[58][59][60] Many modern day Japanese people today that colonized the Ryukyu Islands are a mixture of both Yamato and Ryukyuan.

See also

- Emperor of Japan
- Ethnic groups of Japan
- Japanese battleship *Yamato*
- Japanese nationalism
  - Minzoku (*Volk*)
  - Nihonjinron
- Race and ethnicity in Japan

- Yama-bito
- Yamato (disambiguation)
- Yamato period
- Yamato nadeshiko
- *Yamato-damashii*—"the Japanese spirit"

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